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SUBJECT: U.K. CHARGE D'AFFAIRES DISCUSSES BASRA, LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE WITH THE AMBASSADOR

Classified By: Ambassador Ryan C. Crocker for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: U.K. Charge d'Affaires (CDA) Matthew Lodge alerted the Ambassador to negative publicity in the British press over the U.K. withdrawal from Basra, and stated that the PIC process was on track for August 29. The Ambassador then shared with Lodge his impressions to date of the leaders conference. End Summary.

¶2. (C) CDA Lodge brought to the Ambassador's attention that the British government is getting negative publicity in their Sunday press. "We are getting a kicking in the British media," he said. The story is the perceived split between the U.K. and the U.S. evidenced by the U.K. withdrawal from Basra, which is scheduled for August 29. "The suggestion of an independent British policy is not true," said Lodge, "we are fully coordinated with you and are looking for opportunities to demonstrate that publicly."

¶3. (C) The Ambassador cautioned that we should not comment too much on Basra until we know it is a success, and emphasized that the transfer to Provincial Iraqi Control (PIC) must remain condition-based. "We should not transfer it if we think the palace protection force will simply turn it over to JAM three days later," he said. "Is it going to be a PIC to get the hell out, or a serious process against objective criteria?" Lodge assured the Ambassador that the transfer to PIC process was fully transparent and that the conditions "looked good."

¶4. (C) Lodge asked for our perceptions on the string of governor assassinations. The Ambassador said that "we see the hand of Iran behind it - they are co-opting the JAM extremists." If ISCI and Badr realize it is Iran, they may react in a calculated manner. But if they think it is mainstream JAM, then they will start an ugly survival fight.

¶5. (C) Lodge asked for an overview of the leaders process. The Ambassador said that everyone seemed to be on their best behavior and were spending many hours together without losing their tempers and walking out. The discussions focused on power sharing mechanisms, de-Ba'athification, provincial powers, and detainees. It is not clear that they will all come together on these issues, said the Ambassador. Turning to Towafiq, the Ambassador said that his impression is that they would not return to the government, but that Vice President Tariq Al-Hashimi would continue to participate in the Presidency. This gives Hashimi the best of all worlds, noted the Ambassador, as he is both "in" for decision-making, but also "out" with respect to accountability.

¶6. (C) Lodge asked how long the leaders process could go on. The Ambassador said he thought perhaps another week, after which travel plans would bring the meetings to an end. There is some utility, noted the Ambassador, in having them simply meet and get used to talking to each other. If they get momentum going and the deputies do the proper preparatory work, it is even possible that they could resume later in

September.  
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